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Is Overtourism Overused? Understanding the Impact of Tourism in a City Context

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Abstract: In less than two years, the concept of overtourism has come to prominence as one of the most discussed issues with regards to tourism in popular media and, increasingly, academia. In spite of its popularity, the term is still not clearly delineated and remains open to multiple interpretations. The current paper aims to provide more clarity with regard to what overtourism entails by placing the concept in a historical context and presenting results from a qualitative investigation among 80 stakeholders in 13 European cities. Results highlight that overtourism describes an issue that is multidimensional and complex. Not only are the issues caused by tourism and nontourism stakeholders, but they should also be viewed in the context of wider societal and city developments. The article concludes by arguing that while the debate on overtourism has drawn attention again to the old problem of managing negative tourism impacts, it is not well conceptualized. Seven overtourism myths are identified that may inhibit a well-rounded understanding of the concept. To further a contextualized understanding of overtourism, the paper calls for researchers from other disciplines to engage with the topic to come to new insights.

Keywords: city tourism; tourismphobia; tourism impacts; sustainable tourism; carrying capacity; overtourism; urban planning; governance; destination management; touristification

1. The Rise of Overtourism

Cities provide visitors with a range of multifunctional, complex, multiuser environments. They are able to simultaneously host increasing numbers of domestic and international leisure tourists, but also business tourists and people visiting friends and relatives (VFR). The fact that cities tend to have good infrastructure facilities and already host a diverse and dynamic population suggests that they will better cope with increasing tourist numbers than other destinations. Indeed, until recently, tourism was seen as one of the more sustainable economic growth strategies for cities. Particularly in the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008, it was viewed as an important driver for economic recovery or growth and it was given plenty of scope to develop, thus reinforcing the relative importance of the industry in city destinations [1].

However, in the last years, the perception of city tourism has changed dramatically. Public transportation, infrastructure, roads, museums, attractions and other services that were primarily created for local use suffer under increasing tourist numbers. The growing popularity of online accommodation services (e.g., AirBnB, HomeAway, Uber) and a desire to see 'real' and 'authentic' everyday city life has meant that tourism activities become further intertwined with local life, also outside of the main tourist areas in cities [2]. Such developments have led to an increasingly

vocal call from residents and local stakeholders to deal with tourism growth and protests have been observed in multiple high profile destinations (e.g., Barcelona, Venice). Although the issue is most prominent in European cities, similar sentiments have been reported in other destinations too, for example tropical islands, backpacker ghettos, or even slums [3]. To describe these tourism disturbances, the term 'overtourism' has rapidly been popularized.

In academia, overtourism has become commonplace overnight, too. Whereas it was largely nonexistent prior to 2017, no less than four Special Issues of academic journals and three edited books on the topic will come out in 2018 and 2019. The marketability and popularity of the term overtourism appears to be at least partially accountable for its entry in academia, rather than its explanatory value, as exemplified by a recent paper that uses the term overtourism in its title, yet does not mention it in the main text at all [4]. More problematic is the fact that the term actually can be considered 'fuzzy' in that it is ill-defined, lacks clarity, and is highly difficult to operationalize [5]. As such, it may possibly be used as a vehicle for recycling existing ideas or to obfuscate agency and responsibility [6,7].

The current paper aims to provide more clarity to the overtourism debate by presenting results from a qualitative investigation among 80 stakeholders in 13 European cities. It seeks to provide an understanding of the different ways in which overtourism manifests itself in a city context, the issues underlying it, as well as ways of dealing with it. It reveals overtourism to be a highly complex, opaque phenomenon, which can be oversimplified by stakeholders. Particularly when overtourism has not clearly manifested itself, this may limit their willingness to engage with more radical innovations to prevent the negative impacts of tourism from spiraling out of control. In order to reduce confusion and allow for clearer debates, it is therefore necessary to better delineate overtourism and address some myths that appear to have become associated with the phenomenon.

2. A Concise History of Tourism's Impacts

The term overtourism largely arose from media discourses without much theoretical grounding. The issue it describes—an excessive negative impact of tourism on the host communities and/or natural environment—has been a critical concern within academia for many years, though. While it goes beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full overview of all work on the subject, it is useful to highlight a number of key insights.

As early as the 1960s, authors already discussed the ways in which tourism negatively affected destinations [8,9]. This culminated in concepts such as Doxey's irridex model [10], Butler's tourist life cycle [11] and Pizam's description on the social costs to destination communities [12]. A common thread in this early work was that excessive tourism concentrations led to harm to the local environment and negative attitudes among residents in urban and rural areas. In the 1980s, discussions regarding the carrying capacity of a destination moved this debate forward. The idea is to find the limit with regards to the number of tourists who could visit without serious negative consequences, which may be higher or lower depending on the physical characteristics of the city and residents' attitude, loyalty and pride [13].

While carrying capacity continues to be a popular concept to appreciate the negative consequences of tourism, the usefulness of this perspective has been questioned. The main issue is its focus on tourism numbers, which brings with it that negative effects are equated with mass tourism or increasing visitor numbers [14]. In fact, as early as 1979, Rosenow and Pulsipher [15] recognized three main underlying different causes of what they called visitor 'overkill': (1) Too many visitors, possibly aggravated by seasonality; (2) Too much adverse visitor impact (e.g., noise, rowdiness and other annoyances); (3) Too much physical impact of the visitor economy (e.g., touristified city centers and destruction of natural resources). Later research confirmed that visitor behavior, timing, concentration, location, experience with tourism, local etiquette, etcetera are indeed as important as tourist numbers [16,17]. In addition, whereas the impact of tourists on the physical environment can be determined, this is more difficult for the social environment, which is based on the tolerance of the host community towards

tourists. Not only is this a subjective concept, which is difficult to measure within ever-changing individuals, but also the tolerance levels among residents with different interests do differ [14,18].

Alternative perspectives, such as the levels of acceptable change framework (LAC), provide greater nuance [19]. LAC seeks to appreciate the extent to which the impacts of tourism remain acceptable to local stakeholders in relation to the main issues and concerns. In times of financial need, for example, people may be more tolerant of negative impacts, due to the potential economic benefits of tourism. The benefit of the debates around the LAC framework and similar impact-based approaches is that the emphasis has shifted from numbers to one that is based more on perceived benefits and disadvantages [20–22]. These insights have led to different schools of thought on the ways of managing tourism, in addition to limiting visitor numbers. The first, championed by UNWTO, focuses on increasing the capacity of tourist activities. Capacity can be increased by enlarging the physical capacity of activities, through 'smart' technological solutions [23–26] or by making the local community gain financially by stimulating entrepreneurship [27]. Another school of thought highlights the variety of tourism stakeholders that are involved with and are impacted upon by tourism and the importance of the politics of tourism, power relations and citizen participation, given that benefits and disadvantages are often not spread evenly among stakeholders [28]. It views the limits of a destination as dynamic, contested, and constantly reconstructed in a local context. This largely aligns with some of the systems-oriented approaches to urban tourism that were put forward in the 1990s [17,29–31]. These pointed to the fact that that while "tourists make use of almost all urban features, they make an exclusive use of almost none" and, as such, a more integrative approach would be beneficial [32]. However, in spite of calls, much work on tourism impacts remains exclusively focused on the tourism industry [33,34].

From the late 1990s onwards, the emphasis of work on dealing with tourism impacts shifted. Whereas with carrying capacity, LAC and similar approaches, government and policymakers had a significant role to play in managing and regulating tourism, this changed towards a more hands-off perspective, which put more emphasis on the responsibility of industry actors and individual tourists (e.g., certain conceptualizations of responsible and pro-poor tourism) [6,27]. The focus here is on allowing "the market to act as a form of governance", with government withdrawing from direct involvement and instead seeking "to encourage the tourism industry to move in particular directions" through, for example, financial incentives and education [35]. Such work has been criticized for putting too much responsibility onto actors who lack the resources (e.g., small tourism business owners) or knowledge (e.g., tourists) to act in a sustainable way [3,36]. However, tourism academia, both in research and education, has continued to follow this trend and relinquished its role in "pressing the industry and governing authorities to be more responsible and accountable" [37–39].

Perhaps because of this, the debate regarding overtourism developed outside of tourism academia. Its first use dates back to the early 2000s, when it was used to describe the danger of overusing natural resources [40,41]. About a decade later, the term was introduced in tourism media [42], but it took until late 2016 for it to take off as a counterpart of the Spanish term 'Turismofobia' to describe the outcry among residents in response to the unfettered growth of tourism [43]. Overtourism as a term has proven very marketable and was trademarked by online travel magazine Skift in 2018 (registration number 5494076). The UNWTO definition of overtourism now is "the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors' experiences in a negative way" [26].

Defined in this way, overtourism is similar in its representation of the issue compared to earlier conceptualizations. However, while only a limited set of literature is available that associates itself with overtourism (or tourismphobia) and much of it is explorative in nature, some differences can be observed. Current work is more focused on the relation between tourism and its wider city context and the political aspects of excessive tourism growth [43–46]. The issues related to overtourism are viewed in the light of the interplay of tourism and urban change [47–50]. On this matter, reference can be made to the upcoming discourse regarding tourism gentrification, which describes the transformation

of mostly middle-class neighborhoods into tourism enclaves that are marked by "a proliferation of corporate entertainment and tourism venues" [51]. Whilst coming to the issue from a somewhat different angle, this discourse overlaps with overtourism in that both describe an exclusion of residents and other local stakeholders and the touristification and museumfication of popular tourist areas [52].

In dealing with overtourism issues, the authors of these recent publications emphasize the need for regulation and government leadership. This perceived need is in clear contrast to the more hands-off and self-governance perspectives that have dominated tourism discourses for several decades [24,48], although there is still relatively little clarification of how new policy arrangements could be made to work in practice.

3. Methodology

This study is based on work performed in two research projects regarding overtourism. Over a period of two years, qualitative research was performed in 13 European cities. The first research project ran from 2015–2017 and focused on six large and well-known tourist cities (Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Copenhagen, Lisbon, Munich). Cities were chosen on the basis that they were prime tourist cities in their countries, which already did or were likely to suffer from overtourism in the near future. The idea was that different aspects of overtourism would be visible in these cities, but also a wide variety of strategies to deal with the issue. The second project, which ran from 2017–2018 used the same methodology to investigate tourism in smaller cities or cities with less tourism (Antwerp, Bruges, Ghent, Leuven, Mechelen, Salzburg, Tallinn), as this might shed a closer light on other aspects of overtourism and potential ways of managing the issue. The research was exploratory in nature, with an emphasis on the perception and ways of managing overtourism as well as causes underlying it, rather than directly comparing cities or measuring carrying capacities or values of acceptable change.

In each city, five to ten stakeholders were identified in cooperation with the city's government or the local destination management organization. Participants were purposefully chosen to represent a range of stakeholders (residents, tourism businesses, transport service providers, policymakers and politicians). This resulted in a total of 86 participants (Appendix A), who were interviewed face-to-face (63), via Skype (16) or by phone (5). Two cooperated by answering a set of questions via email. The interviews were semi structured in nature, using a topic list as a basis. This provided the interviewers with structure, whilst allowing for the flexibility needed to customize interviews to the context and interests of the interviewee. Interviews were held by seven interviewers, who received instructions with regards to the subject and the topic list to ensure a similar style of interviewing. Interviews lasted approximately 40–60 min and were held in English or the native tongue of the participant. Interviews were analyzed, by listening to the recordings and writing down key points on an answer sheet, which contained the main topics of the study—perspective on overtourism, manifestation of potential issues, governance, future vision and developments. As a secondary source of data gathering, short interviews were held with 150 residents in the first six cities. The interviewed residents lived in the city center as well as the areas directly bordering the city center. Interviewers rang the bell or knocked on the door at random in these different parts of these areas, and approached people in the street, to get a more diverse sample. The goal of the interviews was to appreciate how residents experienced their encounters with tourism. Interviews were performed by students and were not recorded. Instead, short notes were taken of the main points that were discussed. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to perform this research in the final seven cities. As such, results were used mainly to provide context, rather than a primary source of information.

Results were compared and contrasted, which enabled the identification of emerging patterns on different parameters regarding the perception and management of overtourism. In cases of factual ambiguities, the results were discussed with city representatives to clarify matters. After each research project, a session was held with participating city representatives in a meeting room near Schiphol Airport, the Netherlands. The first of these sessions took place in December 2016 and the second took place in January 2018. For the second session, representatives from the cities that participated in the

first research project were also invited. The idea of the meetings was to discuss findings and jointly further understanding of the topic. This was done by means of a discussion of the research results, but also through a short 'scenario planning' workshop to get shared insights of new developments and potential future issues and solutions related to overtourism.

4. Causes of Disturbance

The discussions with stakeholders revealed that what is now called overtourism is actually an accumulation of different impacts and perceptions that relate both to tourist behavior as well as actions by, and encounters with stakeholders as well as changes to the social, economic and physical environment. As such, it encapsulates a complex and multidimensional concept. The three different causes of disturbance as discussed by Rosenow and Pulsipher [15]—overcrowding in city's public spaces, tourists' behavior and physical touristification—can all be identified, but interviewees also recognized displacement due to AirBnB and similar platforms and excessive pressure on the local environment as separate causes of concern (Table 1). While interviewees mostly appreciated the fact that these issues have different impacts, spatial distribution and causes, overtourism increasingly became an overarching denominator for all as the research progressed. This made some participants conflate causes and effects of different issues or even play down the importance of overtourism. Indeed, participants preferred to talk about visitor pressure, as this was deemed more neutral and did not limit itself to tourism, but also other visitors.

Table 1. Issues that are attributed to tourism.

Issue	Type of Impact	Spatial Distribution
Overcrowding in city's public spaces	Overcrowding on streets and pavements, as well as public transport, heavy traffic, loss of local identity	Tourist hotspots and newly developing tourist areas
Pervasiveness of visitor impact due to inappropriate behavior	Noise, disturbance, loss of local identity	Tourist hotspots and newly developing tourist areas
Physical touristification of city centers and other often-visited areas	Loss of amenities for residents due to mono-culture of tourist shops and facilities	Tourist hotspots and city centers
Residents pushed out of residential areas due to AirBnB and similar platforms	Less availability of housing, loss of sense of community and security	Throughout city, mainly near tourist hotspots
Pressure on local environment	Increased waste, water use, air pollution	Throughout the city, near specific sites (harbor, road junctions)

Source: Interviews, Reference [15].

With regards to overcrowding, the spring months are commonly most problematic due to the combined presence of tourists, residents and day visitors. In the peak summer months, many residents move out of the city, thus 'freeing' up space for tourists. The fact that the tourist season has been prolonged in recent years, to mitigate overcrowding or to stimulate more economic opportunities, has meant that the sense of crowdedness now is observed nearly year-round. This has further contributed to residents' sense of touristification and the feeling that the local identity of the city is lost. While issues with overcrowding and tourists' behavior historically have been most noticeable around tourist hotspots, interviewees noted that even in crowded cities, it was fairly easy to find streets where hardly any tourists ventured. Rather than absolute visitor numbers, they argued that concerns were most pronounced with rapid relative and/or unexpected growth. This can be observed in newly developing tourist areas, which receive relatively few tourists, but often have limited tourist facilities and a residential population that is neither used to nor desires tourism growth. Without sufficient consultation, growth here can cause problems. The advent of Instagram and other social media has meant that unplanned tourism to these locations can increase (e.g., if they are mentioned by a popular

influencer). In addition, sea and river cruise tourism is seen as a (potential) problem in cities like Amsterdam, Barcelona, Bruges, Copenhagen, Lisbon, Salzburg and Tallinn, as it causes large numbers of people to venture into the cities at set times, thus clogging up the city. Findings like this confirm criticisms on using carrying capacity as an 'objective' means for measuring tourism impacts and serve as a point of caution for city authorities that seek to manage tourism by spreading visitors in time or place or seek cruise tourism growth.

Whereas overcrowding can at least to an extent be monitored and measured objectively, it is more difficult to measure the impact of the inappropriate behavior of tourists. Here, individual excesses can have a strong impact on long-term perceptions, even when objective disruption levels remain the same or decrease. One resident shared that she was aware that she lived in a tourist area, and knew that this would give some disturbance, but seeing someone urinate against her house decreased her tolerance of tourism and increased her awareness of tourism annoyances. Another example is the so-called beer-bike—a multipassenger human-powered vehicle, equipped with a beer tap—which has become a symbol for overtourism, even in cities where they are rarely seen. The advent of social media has made it easier to share these sentiments and bring opponents together, frustrating policymakers, who note that relatively insignificant issues are blown out of proportion due to a combination of social media and a willing press. Residential action groups, on the other hand, note that their misgivings were previously ignored by laissez-faire governments and that these developments have merely helped to redress the balance.

Physical touristification of city centers and other tourist areas is related mostly to the changing retail landscape, which increasingly gets tailored to fun-shopping and food consumption rather than local shops. The impact of AirBnB and similar accommodation providers can be seen as a new and slightly different form of touristification. Although private house rental has a long history, internet providers such as AirBnB have caused an explosive growth of such accommodation offerings. Contrary to other forms of physical touristification, AirBnB and similar providers impact neighborhoods throughout the city, leading to a displacement of people rather than services. In addition, residents complain about noise, but also a more general sense of insecurity as they never are quite certain who inhabits these rented properties.

The fact that the increase of visitors to a city puts more pressure on the local environment (e.g., waste and water management) was mentioned only by a limited number of interviewees. The issues that were mentioned relate mostly to local environmental issues that are already problematic. For example, a lack of water is already a problem in Barcelona in summer, yet it is exacerbated by tourists who use a disproportionate amount of it. An exception here is the air pollution caused by cruises, which was seen as a pure tourism problem. Long-term global issues like climate change were not so much related to overtourism, suggesting that it is related predominantly to a city context.

5. Managing Overtourism in a City Context

In line with earlier findings on overtourism, interviewees in this research were keen to point out that while developments in travel and tourism receive most attention, the issues related to tourism are at least partially caused by developments outside of tourism. A wide variety of changes in the social, economic and physical environment, as well as infringements on resident's quality of life, may also be attributed to tourism [17]. A summary of mentioned tourism, city and societal developments that have contributed to an increased pressure on city resources in recent years is provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Developments contributing to issues related to tourism.

Issue	Tourism Related Developments	City and Societal Developments
Overcrowding in city's public spaces	Rise of tourist numbers; cheaper flights, increase of cruise tourism	Increase of residents and commuters; flexible work arrangements; increase of residential leisure; increase of online shopping
Pervasiveness of visitor impact	Rise of tourist numbers; tourists moving deeper into city in search for authentic experiences; increase of cruise tourism; tourism spreading policies	Increase of residential leisure; greater connectedness of residents due to social media; popularity of Instagram and social networks
Physical touristification	Rise of tourist numbers; increased dominance of large tourism businesses	Real estate speculation; city modernization; increased costs of city amenities; limitations on restrictions of urban planning
Residents pushed out of residential areas	Rise of tourist numbers; rise of online platforms like AirBnB; tourist desire for authentic experiences;	Real-estate speculation; increase of internet holiday booking; residential gentrification; rising costs of living; limitations on restrictions of urban planning
Pressure on local environment	Rise of tourist numbers; greater use of resources per tourist	Increase of residents and commuters; increase of extreme weather events.

Source: Interviews, Reference [2,17,43,49,50].

While international tourists are often the most visible group to contribute to perceptions of overtourism, a large and growing number of people also use the physical space in cities for other purposes. Day visitors constitute up to 50% of the people that visit the city for leisure purposes. While these visitors blend in relatively well and are often not viewed as tourists by residents, they also cause overcrowding and annoyances. In addition, the growing popularity of the city as a place to live, work and for leisure means that the number of residents, commuters and day visitors using city infrastructure facilities has increased by up to 10% each year in the participating cities. These groups make use of city space and infrastructure on a daily basis and contribute to an increased perception of crowdedness year-round, as expressed by an interviewee in Salzburg:

> *"Some of the underlying problems have nothing to do with tourism. If there is a rainy day you will have traffic jams in town. Too many people are driving in. If you add a couple of thousands of tourists it breaks down."*

If residents are forced to move out of the city due to tourism gentrification, this puts further pressure on city infrastructure:

> *"People are leaving the city [because] rental prices are way too high. There are many people moving to the surroundings and then commute by car every day. It is a circle that never ends."*

The perception of crowdedness in the city is further augmented by the fact that more flexible work arrangements have made it more common for residents to visit the city and use its retail and hospitality facilities during daytime when most tourists also come to a city. Indeed, behavioral patterns, particularly of middle class urban dwellers, can be nearly indistinguishable from those of tourists [50]. In a similar vein, waste and water use also increase due to greater use by city stakeholders outside of tourism, and media attention for both has increased due to increasing environmental awareness. The strong increase of online shopping further impacts the perceived crowdedness, as an increasing number of different delivery vehicles clog up roads and cause congestion and pollution. In other words, an increasing number of different types of city users and services compete for a limited set of city space and facilities.

To an extent, tourism may be used as a scapegoat by the daily users of the city. It simply is often impossible to determine whether disturbance is caused by a resident or a tourist. In Amsterdam, the example was given of people who were noisy aboard a boat in the canals in the evening. Residents are inclined to put the blame on tourists here. However, it is difficult for tourists to rent a boat in the evening and such disturbance is more likely, therefore, to be caused by local actors.

The impact of the touristification of city centers and online accommodation platforms also needs further clarification. Undoubtedly, tourism has strongly impacted city centers and suburban neighborhoods, but this impact can at least partially be attributed to real-estate developments. After the economic crisis of 2008 and the subsequent crash of the real-estate market, it became more attractive for house owners to rent out properties to tourists, rather than sell them at a loss (see also [53]). In Portugal, the economic bailout after the crisis by the European Commission, the ECB and the IMF was given on the condition that the rental market had to be opened up to the free market. This drastically increased rental prices that had previously been kept artificially low to provide lower-income households with higher quality housing. When the economy started to recover, real-estate speculation, particularly in capital cities, began to drive up house and rental prices and further reduced the number of properties available for local shops and residents. As such, touristification is, at least partially, the visible effect of other, underlying issues.

These examples highlight that overtourism cannot be dealt with sufficiently by focusing on tourism alone. Instead, policy actions are required that take into account wider city usage. However, in the investigated cities, the emphasis remains on increasing the carrying capacity by developing the tourist industry and its attractions or mitigating the negative impacts. In cities where overtourism is not an issue, tourism growth still mostly goes unquestioned, even when new ways of management are discussed [54]. In addition, interviewees noted that within the current political climate, the emphasis remains on economic or voluntary arrangements. This confirms earlier findings, which emphasize voluntary and economic measures in managing tourism impacts (e.g., admission charges, education) [26,55]. At the same time, the number of stakeholders in the cities who advocate a need to curb growth and increase regulation is on the rise, possibly also driven by the fact that antitourism sentiments prominently featured in the last municipal elections in Amsterdam and Barcelona. Measures have been implemented or are considered to regulate traffic (e.g., coach free zones), regulate tourist behavior (e.g., strict regulation in tourist hotspots at night), manage disturbance caused by tourist groups (e.g., use of earphones to listen to tour guides), tax cruise ships and day-visitors, etcetera. Particular efforts are made to regulate providers such as AirBnB through, for example, a limitation on the number of days a property can be rented out, the fact that a house-owner needs to live in the rented place, taxation, registration systems, etcetera. Although policy measures and legal regulations have up to now had difficulty keeping up with the rapid developments within this sector, interviewees argued that progress is being made with such measures.

The complexity of overtourism reveals itself again when looking at the effects of policy measures. It is revealed that these have been, at times, different than expected. For example, in Bruges, city-center parking tariffs were raised aggressively to make tourists and day-visitors contribute more to the city budget. In practice, this led to perceptions of touristification at the expense of residents. Tourists were willing and able to pay the higher parking tariffs, but regular users now had to park outside of the city center. Another example is the great faith that is put in smart or technological solutions as a means to more efficiently measure impacts and steer tourism to maximize its carrying capacity. As discussed previously, tourism capacity is but one element of overtourism. In addition, city governments are already overloaded with apps and technological solutions that they need to promote and/or implement, also to deal with issues outside of tourism.

One issue that policymakers agreed on was the difficulty they had in implementing policies to deal with overtourism, also because it is not a tourism-only problem. Management measures that take into account the wider city policy structure will require cooperation between multiple city departments and other stakeholders, including residents. The remit of tourism policy makers or other

tourism stakeholders is too limited to successfully initiate such measures. As such, interviewees noted that it was key to get tourism more established as an integral part of city development. Amsterdam is experimenting with such an approach by means of a separate entity titled 'City in Balance'. Although commendable, the program has only few committed employees and other stakeholders argued they were still insufficiently consulted. This perceived lack of consultation reiterates one of the most often mentioned challenges for dealing with overtourism, namely to get stakeholders from within and outside of tourism involved to work together and come up with joint city-wide solutions.

6. Discussion

Within a very short time, overtourism has become the 'de facto' descriptor for excessive negative tourism impacts. The issues it describes are similar to those discussed in earlier studies [13,15,16], although these are perceived as a problem now in a greater number of cities and they can be also observed beyond tourist hotspots and city centers. The debate surrounding overtourism has helped to draw attention to the negative consequences of unconstrained tourism growth. In doing so, it has pointed towards limitations of market-oriented voluntary approaches to effectively deal with this issue [1]. Instead, possibilities for more regulatory, government-led approaches to manage tourism that seemed to have gone out of fashion since the start of the century were up for discussion again [16,56].

The results show that the impacts of tourism are diverse, complex and multifaceted and that the term overtourism fails to fully encapsulate this complexity. Overtourism suggests a certain kind of uniformity of tourism impacts and implies that cities have a carrying capacity that tourism can overshoot. This can be an issue when seeking solutions, as it hinders a common understanding between different stakeholders of the specific nature of the problem(s) within the local context [14]. Such an understanding is particularly important because overtourism is not caused by tourism alone and successful management strategies will require cooperation with stakeholders outside of tourism, including residents [57]. More neutral terminology, like 'visitor pressure'—preferred by most interviewees—or already existing concepts, such as 'levels of acceptable change' or 'carrying capacity', would appear more helpful when trying to appreciate the impact of tourism on city destinations.

Earlier work has already highlighted the importance of the urban context and the place of tourism in urban planning [46–48,50]. However, the results from this research indicated that the issues can also be rooted in wider societal developments, like changing lifestyles and seemingly unrelated things, like the increase of internet shopping and social media. This suggests that overtourism should no longer be perceived as a *tourism* problem or as an *urban* problem, but rather as a *social* problem within a city context.

These nuances are still largely lacking in the current discussions on overtourism and this may have led to what can best be described as 'overtourism myths'. These myths may well have acted as a focal point to raise awareness, create coalitions and popularize the concept of overtourism, but moving forward, they can also promulgate falsehoods and inhibit further understanding [58]. At least seven myths cropped up during the research, which will be shortly reviewed to help demystify the term and lead to a more well-rounded understanding:

1. *Overtourism is not a recent phenomenon*—In spite of the recent increase of attention to overtourism, the underlying issues on which it is predicated are not new, even if they may be more intense and expressed in new ways (e.g., sharing economy platforms);
2. *Overtourism is not the same as mass tourism*—Whilst increasing tourist numbers are a cause of overtourism, some areas are able to cope with large numbers of tourists. It is about perceived tourism encounters, environmental changes and infringements on people's lives [17]. Indeed, even a small absolute increase of tourist numbers in newly developing tourist areas can have great negative impacts;
3. *Overtourism impacts are not city-wide*—Overtourism is predominantly observed in (increasingly) popular parts of the city, at a certain time or during certain events. Even though this means that

there are areas with limited tourism activity, residents can still perceive overtourism. It is not a concept that can be objectively measured;

4. *Overtourism is not a tourism-only problem*—Overtourism is caused by an overuse of the resources, infrastructure, or facilities of a destination, or parts thereof. Tourists share these with residents, commuters and day visitors and their numbers have also increased in recent years. In addition, wider societal trends and events (e.g., the global crisis of 2008, real-estate speculation, increase of internet use for shopping and/or social media) have also contributed to the issues now associated with overtourism;
5. *Technological or smart solutions alone will not solve overtourism*—The importance of technological solutions to combat overtourism should not be overestimated, given that the issue of overtourism is largely social in nature—different groups of city users sharing and competing for the same space. In addition, new technologies also lead to or intensify specific issues in the city (e.g., sharing economy accommodation platforms);
6. *There is no one-size-fits-all solution for overtourism*—The way in which overtourism manifests itself, as well as the possibilities for dealing with the issues strongly depend on the city context and solutions need to be made to fit this local context. To achieve this, stakeholders need to engage with each other to come to inclusive solutions;
7. *Overtourism is not just an issue in cities*—Much of the discussion regarding overtourism focuses on the tourist city context, but it can also be observed in rural or island destinations.

To prevent myths like these from continuing to color the debate on overtourism, it is recommended that academic researchers continue to engage with the issue, both through direct interaction with stakeholders [59], but also by building a strong body of academic output that informs teaching [60–62]. The literature review has already shown that there is a rich history of work to form the basis for future work. It is recommended not to let this work go to waste and to build on it rather than start a new overtourism discourse. Having said that, future research should not limit itself to rehashing the earlier work. There is a need for more advanced analytical frameworks and process-oriented research that shed a new light on the role of tourism for future city development and the complex interactions between residents, commuters, tourists and other stakeholders [63]. Results indicate that misunderstandings and lack of communication between these stakeholders are one of the main issues that hinder solutions.

A recommendation to achieve this is for tourism scholars to engage more with other disciplines and vice versa. This includes discussions on (tourism) gentrification, the right to the city, transformative changes, etcetera. Current discourses on these issues are largely informed by thinking from other domains (human geography, urban planning, innovation studies), which may hold the key to new avenues of research and frameworks to deal with overtourism. It is promising that several contributions have already started to bring in such thinking [47,48,50,52]. A promising line of work deals with social innovation, where concepts like inclusiveness and resilience are increasingly recognized as important for a long-term sustainable development of tourism destinations [64,65]. Still, many avenues are still left unexplored. Microanalyses of specific impacts are one example of this. A recent study on the influence of overtourism on the quality of employment has provided highly useful insights already [66]. The combined efforts from scholars from such different disciplinary backgrounds will be key to better understanding the role of tourism in a city context as well as the (im)possibilities of managing overtourism.

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Appendix A

Table A1. List of interviewees.

	Name	City	Organization/Company
1	AMS1	Amsterdam	WeCity App
2	AMS2	Amsterdam	Stad in Balans
3	AMS3	Amsterdam	Iamsterdam
4	AMS4	Amsterdam	Vereniging Amsterdam City
5	AMS5	Amsterdam	Stadsregio Amsterdam
6	AMS6	Amsterdam	G250 Buurttop de pijp
7	AMS7	Amsterdam	Freelance author
8	ANT1	Antwerp	Building Today for Tomorrow
9	ANT2	Antwerp	MAS Museum
10	ANT3	Antwerp	Visit Antwerpen
11	ANT4	Antwerp	Antwerp Hotel Association
12	ANT5	Antwerp	Stad Antwerpen
13	ANT6	Antwerp	Visit Antwerpen
14	ANT7	Antwerp	Touristram
15	ANT8	Antwerp	Touristram
16	BAR1	Barcelona	Independent consultant
17	BAR2	Barcelona	Turisme Sant Ignasi
18	BAR3	Barcelona	Turisme de Barcelona
19	BAR4	Barcelona	Trade Union UGT
20	BAR5	Barcelona	Associació d'Apartaments Turístics de Barcelona
21	BER1	Berlin	Berliner Senat
22	BER2	Berlin	Senat Neukoelln
23	BER3	Berlin	Senat Charlottenburg
24	BER4	Berlin	VisitBerlin
25	BER5	Berlin	Sofitel/Kurfuerstendamm
26	BER6	Berlin	Friedrichsstadtpalast
27	BER7	Berlin	Stadtentwicklung Berlin
28	BRU1	Bruges	Interparking NV
29	BRU2	Bruges	Stad Bruges
30	BRU3	Bruges	Visit Bruges
31	BRU4	Bruges	Kenniscentrum Toerisme en Horeca
32	BRU5	Bruges	Hello Bruges

Table A1. *Cont.*

	Name	City	Organization/Company
33	COP1	Copenhagen	Tourist Office, formerly WoCo
34	COP2	Copenhagen	Roskilde University
35	COP3	Copenhagen	Strømma Danmark A/S
36	COP4	Copenhagen	Wonderful Copenhagen
37	COP5	Copenhagen	Tivoli A/S
38	COP6	Copenhagen	Turismens Vækstråd
39	GHE1	Ghent	Visit Gent
40	GHE2	Ghent	Horeca Vlanderen
41	GHE3	Ghent	Stad Gent
42	GHE4	Ghent	Stad Gent
43	GHE5	Ghent	Stad Gent
44	GHE6	Ghent	Sint-Baafs Cathedral
45	LEU1	Leuven	Visit Leuven
46	LEU2	Leuven	Visit Leuven
47	LEU3	Leuven	Leuvenement
48	LEU4	Leuven	De Lijn
49	LEU5	Leuven	Stad Leuven
50	LEU6	Leuven	Stad Leuven
51	LEU7	Leuven	Leuven Leisure
52	LIS1	Lisbon	Turismo de Lisboa—Visitor and Convention Bureau
53	LIS2	Lisbon	Câmara Municipal de Lisboa
54	LIS3	Lisbon	Associação da Hotelaria, Restauração e Similares de Portugal
55	LIS4	Lisbon	União de Associações do Comércio e Serviços
56	LIS5	Lisbon	Associação Renovar a Mouraria
57	MEC1	Mechelen	Kazerne Dossin
58	MEC2	Mechelen	Visit Mechelen
59	MEC3	Mechelen	Stad Mechelen
60	MEC4	Mechelen	Stad Mechelen
61	MEC5	Mechelen	Stad Mechelen
62	MEC6	Mechelen	Stad Mechelen
63	MUN1	Munich	Tourismuskommission Munchen
64	MUN2	Munich	Munich Airports
65	MUN3	Munich	Director of the DMO Munich Tourism
66	MUN4	Munich	Referat fuer Arbeit und Wirtschaft Munchen
67	MUN5	Munich	Allianz Arena
68	MUN6	Munich	City Partner Munich (Retail Marketing Association)
69	SAL1	Salzburg	Salzburg Christmas Market
70	SAL2	Salzburg	Panorama Tours and Travel GmbH
71	SAL3	Salzburg	Salzburg AG
72	SAL4	Salzburg	Salzburg AG

Table A1. *Cont.*

	Name	City	Organization/Company
73	SAL5	Salzburg	Hohensalzburg Fortress
74	SAL6	Salzburg	Tourismus Salzburg GmbH
75	SAL7	Salzburg	Tourismus Salzburg GmbH
76	SAL8	Salzburg	Helbrunn Palace
77	SAL9	Salzburg	City of Salzburg
78	TAL1	Tallinn	Estonian Folk Art and Craft Union
79	TAL2	Tallinn	Estonian Travel & Tourism Association
80	TAL3	Tallinn	Port of Tallinn
81	TAL4	Tallinn	National Heritage Protection Unit
82	TAL5	Tallinn	Tallinn Urban Planning Department
83	TAL6	Tallinn	Tallinn City Administrations
84	TAL7	Tallinn	Tallinn City Tourist Office & Convention Bureau
85	TAL8	Tallinn	Tallinn City Tourist Office & Convention Bureau
86	TAL9	Tallinn	Society of the Tallinn Old Town

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